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## Freshman Composition Courses in Twelve Illinois Colleges

High-school teachers of English sometimes inquire how they can better prepare their college-bound students for the perils and vicissitudes of freshman composition. The purpose of this issue of the *Bulletin* is to provide a partial and indirect answer to that question, in the form of summaries of the courses in freshman English offered by twelve Illinois colleges and universities. The twelve are intended to be representative: they include a junior college, a teachers college, several liberal arts colleges, and the largest universities in the state. Although the freshman English courses in other Illinois colleges no doubt vary somewhat from those described in the pages that follow, the variations are probably not extreme.

Two points should be clearly understood. First, no college wishes to prescribe the content or emphasis of any high-school English course. The days when high-school courses of study were determined mainly by the demands of colleges are, happily, in the past.

Second, no college expects or wants high schools to teach students the same things that are included in the college courses. As one director of freshman English stated in a letter, "High-school teachers do often write in, apparently worried about the probable success of their students in college courses. Such inquiries have always made me uneasy because I have felt that the teacher planned to prep the students for the particular course and thus anticipate our course. But it seems to me that this sort of pointing is made at the sacrifice of important values and attitudes that ought to be acquired in high school."

Each of the twelve statements that follow was prepared by a chairman of freshman composition or by someone whom he desig-

nated. The statements will serve their purpose if they correct misconceptions regarding freshman courses in college English, and if they assist in any other way in the articulation of high-school and college English.

### BLACKBURN COLLEGE

By HARRIET STODDARD

English 101-102, Written and Spoken English, is a required freshman course in Communication at Blackburn College, three hours each semester. Our students are carefully selected and in the main well prepared for college. Even so, those who rate lowest in the general entrance examination, (covering usage, spelling, and vocabulary), approximately 20 out of 170, are placed in a special section which has an additional non-credit hour each semester. This class covers much the same work that the regular sections do, sometimes in adapted form; there is also an extended review of the fundamental mechanics of writing, and there is consideration of individual difficulties in reading, writing, and speaking. For several years we had also a special section for those with unusual ability and interest in English.

The aims of the course are as follows: to help the freshman to think clearly, analytically, critically; to speak and write sincerely and as well as possible in the time allotted for practice; through thoughtful listening to stimulate the evaluation of subject matter and method, in talks by students and in general college lectures by outside speakers; to become familiar with the resources of libraries and to enjoy both extensive and intensive reading; to choose, analyze, and evaluate fairly, the best in the current literature with which he is and will be confronted; to enhance through sensitive observation and the pleasure of expression in words, appreciation of the objective and subjective elements in the world about him.

We have tried to keep the course diversified, practically useful, and culturally stimulating. Emphasis is not placed on the accumulation of knowledge, the memorization of literary facts and of rules, but rather on the development, through practice, of effectiveness in reading, writing, and speaking. We hope that some literary background is acquired in the process.

Assignments in reading, writing, and speaking, which form the major part of the course, are often closely integrated, as, for instance, in the study of biography and narration. Students receive individual help and criticism through written comments and in the conferences required of all. In addition, there is training in listen-



ing and in observation. Last year the classes saw two motion pictures, *Great Expectations* and *How Green Was My Valley*. Written reports and oral discussions follow attendance of lectures and of movies.

Reading includes use of an anthology with essays, short stories, plays, biography, and verse. The first semester is devoted primarily to exposition; the second semester to a research paper, drama, short story, and verse. Students read six books for critical review, oral or written. The first, a novel, is read by all, in order that some of the methods of critical evaluation may be brought out in class. The other five books are chosen freely, by the students, from a flexible list, the chief requirement being that the work have some real value and literary distinction. Early in the year we introduce students to the library and to the reference collection especially. For reading we make use also of periodicals in the library, including one assignment in book review magazines and one report on a magazine new to the individual student. There is a limited amount of reading on the techniques of composition. In the regular sections perhaps four or five lessons are devoted to quick review of fundamentals. Correct usage is stressed rather than full instruction in formal grammar.

There are assignments in speaking or writing once in nearly every week. Half the class make three-minute talks and the other half hand in themes on the same day; two days are required to complete both assignments for a class of twenty. Approximately fifteen themes, and outlines, letters, a research paper, and book reviews comprise the written work. The average theme is two pages in length. Several themes are written in class during the year.

Assignments in speaking may be the three-minute talks already referred to, and the class discussions of text readings, lectures, magazines, or moving pictures. We have several carefully prepared panel discussions in the course of a year. For aid in speech we have found the tape recorder more successful than the cutting of records.

We try to prepare the student carefully for any special assignment he is given, sometimes using mimeographed directions or questions. So far as possible, we do not allude to the fact that this is a "required" course because it is so "important." Instead, we try to catch the student's interest and to keep him busy at various types of work, *some* of which he is almost certain to enjoy and all of which we hope will aid in his development as an educated person.

Good teaching in the high schools is clearly evident to those of

us who teach English in college. We know the handicaps under which many of you work—some of us have taught in high school. If there are three needs we note more than others, they are these: the attempt to develop more mature, critical, alert thinking about reading done in the high school (for example, too many book reviews seem to be mere summaries); more interest in the individual student and in his thinking (this does not necessarily imply long conferences!); and more practice, at least in *writing*, particularly in the third and fourth years of many high school courses. We thank you for the work already done with all of our freshmen—not just the few shining lights.

### BRADLEY UNIVERSITY

By ALEX J. KATAUSKAS

The aims and content of the freshman course in English at Bradley are at least generally indicated in the following description of the course given in the *Bradley University Bulletin*: "A study of how to present ideas correctly and effectively. Practice is given in the types of composition most often used by both students and people in business and professional life. The work of the first semester is largely in exposition; the second takes up letters, argument, description, and sometimes narrative." Also in the *Bulletin*, under "Requirements for Baccalaureate Degrees," is indicated the emphasis the University places on writing: "A satisfactory proficiency in written English must be attained. Qualifying examinations are given for all candidates for a baccalaureate degree at the end of the sophomore year except those who are excused because of grades of A or B in English 102. The examination may be taken during the junior or the senior year if satisfactory proficiency has not been proved at an earlier date. Remedial classes are open without extra fee for all students who desire to avail themselves of that service." (Since the opening of the Writing Clinic in October, 1951, for upperclassmen and graduate students, the non-credit Remedial classes have been reserved primarily for freshman students.)

But of particular help to high-school teachers of English interested in what will be expected of their graduates may be this list of serious errors taken from the "Minimum Requirements for the Beginning Freshman" prepared by the English Department: the sentence fragment, the comma splice, the fused sentence, failure to distinguish between the adjective and adverb, errors in agreement, incorrect tense, use of the semicolon between parts



of unequal rank, errors in capitalization, faulty use of the apostrophe and quotation marks, the more glaring errors in diction (slang, jargon, illiteracies, and improprieties), careless omission of words, violations of sentence unity, mixed constructions or incomplete constructions, illogical separation of modifiers (dangling modifiers, etc.), and errors in spelling. Though there may be minor variations to this list, it serves as an effective starting point when only one major error to every one hundred words of writing is allowed.

Answers to specific questions concerning the aims and content of the course follow:

1. This fall, because of the decline in enrollment and its limiting the feasibility of sectioning, the placement examination was not given. Instead, an in-class theme during the first week, and any other work during the semester, were used to determine which students need the aid of the remedial classes.

2. After they have demonstrated their ability in English 101, especially able students may be exempted from English 102. However, since there are no "star" sections, students who decline exemption continue in the regular courses.

3. Because English Composition 101-102 deals chiefly with written English, only occasionally will some sections do oral work in argumentation in 102.

4. The reading of literature for the most part consists of the selections in the book of readings used.

5. The syllabus for the course suggests no more than two weeks to be devoted to a review of formal grammar; how much emphasis is placed on formal grammar is determined largely by the students' own weaknesses. But students who have only a limited knowledge of grammatical terminology are not handicapped if they can write with reasonable clarity, coherence, and correctness.

6. The course does not include any special drills. Even in the Remedial classes drills are rarely used.

7. During the year students write twenty to twenty-five themes of about three hundred words each. Of these themes about five are written in class. In place of or in addition to one of the shorter themes, each student writes a long documented paper for English 101, and a long brief (or several short briefs) for English 102. Exercises in the paragraph, precis, letters, and the outline may call for additional writing.

The content of the course, briefly, is as follows for English 101: 1. Review of Grammar, 2. Punctuation and Mechanics, 3. Spelling, 4. Diction, 5. Sentence Rhetoric, 6. The Paragraph, 7. The Theme, 8. The Research Paper, 9. Precis, Outlines, Vocabulary Building, and Note-taking; for English 102: 1. Letter, 2. Argument, 3. Description, 4. Narration, 5. Reading for Comprehension, 6. Vocabulary Building, Note-taking, and Writing Examinations. The aim of the course is, then, to help the student attain such a mastery of the contents as will satisfactorily improve his writing ability.

## ELMHURST COLLEGE

By HAZEL CHRISMAN

The freshman English course at Elmhurst College is planned to aid the student in mastering the essentials of grammar and rhetoric and in learning the significant methods of reading for an understanding of the intrinsic value of literature.

All students are required to take freshman English. (Superior students are not exempt.) Students who, on the basis of placement examinations, show great deficiency are required to take an additional two hours of tutorial English without credit.

The work of the first semester deals primarily with careful and exact reading of essays and with practice in expository writing, stressing organization, fundamentals of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage. During the first semester the student is required to write at least ten themes, averaging about four hundred words in length. Usually at least three of these themes are written in class.

The work of the second semester includes practice in reading the short story, the novel, poetry, and drama. There is continued practice in writing, including assignments in research, criticism, and imaginative writing.

Since our curriculum includes a speech course for freshmen, very little stress is given to oral work in the freshman English course. In other words, ours is not a "communications" course.

It is generally believed that the students who do best in freshman English are those who have had extensive practice in writing in high school. Formal grammar is stressed only after the English teachers have detected the students' weaknesses, through careful reading and checking of themes and through individual conferences. (The English teacher may well follow the procedure of the physician: Diagnose; prescribe; check; re-check.)



**LYONS TOWNSHIP JUNIOR COLLEGE (LaGrange)**

By DORLES C. PARSHALL

At the beginning of the freshman year at Lyons Township Junior College, students take an examination on reading, mechanics, and effectiveness of expression. This examination is chiefly for the enlightenment of the teachers, for we do not exempt any students or place any in remedial sections.

Both oral and written English are included in our course, although there is as yet little emphasis upon oral work. We do not consider our course, therefore, as one in "communications," although we may move in that direction. Students do considerable intensive reading of essays and stories in a textbook.

Students write a theme every fourth meeting, the length varying with the subject and the type of assignment. A long research paper (1500 to 2500 words) is assigned in the second semester.

We place comparatively little emphasis upon formal grammar. The ability to write with reasonable coherence is more important than a detailed knowledge of grammatical terminology.

Three weaknesses of our incoming freshmen are especially noticeable: 1. They are extremely limited in word power: their vocabularies are meager and colorless, their dictionaries are old and dusty, and they have never heard of a thesaurus. 2. They have little understanding or appreciation of a nicely turned sentence; they need considerable study of sentence style. 3. Many have never mastered some elementary matters of usage such as the distinction between *lie* and *lay* or between *who* and *whom*.

**McKENDREE COLLEGE**

By MILDRED SILVER

At McKendree College we have just reorganized our freshman English courses, along with our whole English curriculum, to try to meet more realistically the wide differences in the preparation, ability, and accomplishment of our entering students. Hence our courses are more experimental in nature than usual.

Each freshman takes a placement test consisting of an 800-1000 word essay and a test in reading, mechanics, and effectiveness of expression. If he falls below a scaled score of 50 in any division of the test, or if he writes inadequately, he is required to enroll in one or more of our remedial courses. These are: English 3A, Usage and Mechanics; 3B, Vocabulary and Word Study; 3C, Remedial Reading. These courses, each carrying one hour credit, are taken simultaneously with English 1.

This year we shall not section our English 1 according to ability, since with our complicated schedule complete sectioning is impossible and a partial sectioning defeats the ends desired. We do not usually excuse students from these courses, though in exceptional cases we might allow a mature student to substitute an advanced course. We are hoping to publish good student writing as an incentive to better students to do their best.

Our English 1 is essentially a communications course, with the emphasis on reading and writing. Themes, mostly short, written both in class and out, are required weekly or oftener. Notebooks, which are checked periodically, include vocabulary work, spelling lists, class notes, corrected themes, bibliographies, and informal reading notes. We hope to teach composition largely by practice and individual help. We do not consider the use of workbooks or the study of formal grammar a legitimate substitute for composition.

In English 2 (second semester Freshman English) we continue the composition work and include one longer documented paper. The emphasis in this semester is on an introduction to literature. This inclusion is forced upon us by our requirement of only six hours of English for graduation. A preliminary unit on the nature of literature and its evaluation is followed by three month-long units on fiction, drama, and poetry respectively.

To supplement English 2, we give "English 4, Remedial Reading and Writing," required of all those who are still seriously deficient. Here we may have some formal teaching of usage, but we hope to do considerable individual work. This is a two-hour credit course.

We give a proficiency test, similar to the placement test, at the end of English 2, and again in the junior year. The passing of the proficiency test in the junior or senior year is a graduation requirement. If a student fails this test, he has to take another course in composition before he may repeat the test. This is one means of keeping the student from feeling that he can safely forget composition and slump into former bad habits as soon as he has his credit for freshman English.

### MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY

By RUTH ANDERSON MAXWELL

At Millikin University all entering freshmen take a standardized eighty-minute achievement test (covering mechanics and reading comprehension) and write a theme on a subject selected from a group of ten or twelve possible subjects. For each of these



tests students are divided into groups of from fifty to seventy-five. Those whose scores are low are placed in sections meeting four times a week for three hours of credit. Those whose scores are high are placed in a section where they receive training commensurate with their ability. Shifts may be made by the instructor within the opening two-week period and at the end of the first semester.

The course in freshman English offers some training in listening, speaking, and reading—as no doubt all such courses do—but it is not a so-called course in communication. It aims primarily to assist the student in the development of the ability to think clearly and to express thought purposively and coherently. The student has achieved this objective when he can write a series of chain paragraphs that develop a single controlling idea. He has achieved it when he can bring to his work (1) an organization that is clear in purpose and orderly in arrangement; (2) development that is adequate and reasonably mature; (3) familiarity with the paragraph as a unit of thought and as a part of a longer theme; (4) familiarity with patterns of thinking—with methods of expanding thought; and (5) a high degree of accuracy in the formation of sentences.

Although the course is concerned primarily with written composition, it encourages students to become good listeners, to take logical notes, and to speak with ease and clearness in the classroom. An occasional assignment may be linked with an assembly address, or a student may be asked to bring in a brief report on a topic that arises in discussion. Always there is emphasis on the need for orderly communication.

A secondary aim is to help the student develop ability to interpret the printed page. This aim is correlated with the primary objective of the course. The student is asked to discover key concepts—words or sentences or paragraphs—in what he reads; to distinguish between primary and secondary statements; and to summarize or outline certain pieces of expository writing. He is led to see structure in what he reads. He reads to find out how others have handled ideas and to consider how methods and structure used by others can be valuable to him. Certain pieces generate discussion—and here oral English finds a place. Many of the articles stimulate thinking that may lead to a topic for written work. Or the articles themselves may be drawn upon for other types of assignments. For example, the student may be asked to answer some specific questions specifically and coherently.

The materials of the course include a book of readings, a handbook, and a good dictionary. Assignments vary among instructors. In the first semester from twelve to fifteen themes are assigned. In the second semester the student writes one fairly long or two short library papers. He writes from eight to ten other themes. Some of these may be digests of what he has read. Some of them are written in the classroom. An instructor may of course make use of several short writing projects that have not been classified here as themes.

Entering students are not seriously handicapped if they have only a slight knowledge of grammatical terminology but are able to write with reasonable coherence, including grammatical correctness. But ordinarily the student who writes "with reasonable coherence" has a fair command of grammatical terminology. Terminology has become for him a tool; a means of considering relationships and of talking about them. Terminology cannot of course serve its purpose unless a knowledge of it is accompanied by an understanding of the use served by the word, phrase, or clause for which the term stands. Grammar is functional. A knowledge of it is linked closely with the student's ability to recognize the sentence as a unit of thought made up of subject and predication; to differentiate between main phrasing and modification. Without some knowledge of terminology the student is unable to follow explanations presented to him in a handbook of usage—unless he is willing to track down terms by using the index.

"Drill books" are not used in the freshman courses at Millikin. Grammar is approached through errors in student writing and through material in the handbook of English usage. In four-hour sections there is more emphasis on mechanics than in other sections. The students in these classes are not prepared to do the work that should reasonably be expected of them in college. They are thus required to devote extra time to English. No block of time is set aside for a review of formal grammar or for special drills. Errors are marked with reference to the handbook. Explanations are made in class when a matter seems to concern several students. Progress exercises are used in class or even at times made the basis of an assignment. The student must revise all his themes.

The job of teaching English in the public schools is a big and challenging one; it is a big and challenging one at the college level. At both levels the student no doubt needs as much training as he can get in the ability to think clearly and to express



his thoughts in clear and orderly fashion. At both levels he comes to us with varying degrees of ability and of willingness to learn. He comes also with varying degrees of preparation for work at the level expected of him.

## MUNDELEIN COLLEGE

By SISTER MARY RICHARD, B.V.M.

### *Catalogue Listing*

1. FUNDAMENTALS OF ENGLISH. This course is required of freshmen who do not meet entrance standards in grammar, spelling, reading, and effective expression. Does not replace English 4. (5)

3(4). RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION. Sentence and paragraph structure; the four forms of discourse; special attention to writing the research article. Required of freshmen. (3)

5(6). ADVANCED COMPOSITION. Development of proficiency in writing with emphasis on maturity of thought and niceties of expression. Open to freshmen with superior placement rating. Replaces English 3(4). (3)

The English Department of Mundelein College gives placement tests at the beginning of the scholastic year. On the data thus acquired, together with the high-school record in English, the sectioning listed above is based.

Poorly prepared students are placed in a special, *credit* course—FUNDAMENTALS OF ENGLISH. Superior students are placed in ADVANCED COMPOSITION. Since Mundelein College ordinarily does not accept students from the lowest fourth of their graduating class, the poorly prepared group is small—always under twenty or about one-fifteenth of the freshman class. There are always two ADVANCED COMPOSITION groups with twenty to twenty-five in each group. Every instructor in the English Department teaches at least *one* class in Freshman English, with twenty to twenty-five students in a class.

The course deals with oral as well as written English, with a special two-hour Speech course in addition, which may be taken in any semester of the freshman or sophomore year. The course in Freshman English *could* be called *Communications*, but need not be so called.

The course includes the reading of literature, from a text in use in all sections. Grammar is stressed as the need presents itself, all sections using a handbook. If students write acceptable

English, they soon learn at least minimum terminology. All freshmen take a spelling test before the middle of the first semester, each instructor making a list from the handbook, or from student papers, for her own section. Drill is given as occasion demands. Each student is urged and assisted "to learn to spell her own vocabulary." Minimum essentials of punctuation are stressed with each theme.

Students are expected to write twelve themes each semester. The long research article, written in the second half of the first semester, substitutes for three themes. Book reviews may be oral or written, at the option of the instructor. A written review counts as a theme. Exposition in reading and writing holds the main emphasis in the first semester, but the instructor is free, within reasonable limits, provided that the chief objectives of the course are achieved.

The objectives of the courses in English are 1. to train the student to express her ideas in correct and artistic speech and writing; 2. to cultivate in the student high standards of literary taste, and to give her an appreciation and enjoyment of literary masterpieces; 3. to enable her, through the study of the aesthetic, moral, and religious implications in literature, to make adjustments, and to bring enrichment to her own life.

## NORTHERN ILLINOIS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

By J. HAL CONNOR

Four courses figure in the freshman communication program of the Northern Illinois State Teachers College. Three of these courses (COMPOSITION I, COMPOSITION II, and NEWS WRITING) are offered by the English Department, and the other (FUNDAMENTALS OF SPEECH) is offered by the Speech Department. The following excerpts from the catalog descriptions of these courses will give some notion of the aims and scope of the program:

### COMPOSITION I

One Quarter

This course emphasizes the principles of effective communication, oral and written, as related to effective thinking. It provides experience in the preparation of short papers and oral assignments, practice in the intelligent reading and interpretation of printed material, and training in the resources of the library. It is required of all freshmen, except those who qualify, through the selective entrance test, for COMPOSITION II.



**COMPOSITION II**

One Quarter

This course continues the work of COMPOSITION I but is concerned with larger problems in each type of discourse. The student presents many papers and talks. He also prepares a longer piece of work that requires considerable research, the results of which he presents orally and in writing. This is a required course, but upon recommendation of his COMPOSITION I instructor, the student may substitute NEWS WRITING for it. Such recommendation is made on the basis of the student's capacities and interests.

**FUNDAMENTALS OF SPEECH**

One Quarter

This course is designed to develop proficiency in oral communication. It considers problems of voice and articulation, bodily expression, the use of oral language, the selection and organization of materials, and speaker-listener relationships. It is required of all freshmen.

**NEWS WRITING**

One Quarter

This course deals with the requisites of good reporting: obtaining information, covering news beats, writing the news lead, and organizing the news story. It is not a required course, but as explained under "COMPOSITION II" above, it may, under certain conditions, be substituted for COMPOSITION II.

At the beginning of the freshman year, all students take a standardized English test which covers spelling, punctuation, and usage. Those whose achievement is equivalent to the 75 percentile score nationally are permitted to take a supplementary test of English vocabulary. Those who achieve the median score nationally on this test are then permitted to enroll in COMPOSITION II without taking COMPOSITION I. The results of the tests do not exclude any student from taking COMPOSITION I for credit, nor are they used as a basis for homogeneous sectioning. There are no non-credit sections.

Speech tests are not given prior to a student's enrollment in FUNDAMENTALS OF SPEECH, but early in the course a voice recording is made for each student. On the basis of this recording, the student and the instructor analyze together such aspects of the student's speech as voice quality, pitch pattern, force, rate, articulation, enunciation, pronunciation, and accuracy of usage. Near the end of the course, a final recording is made, and again the student and instructor listen together analyzing the stu-

dent's progress and noting any weaknesses still to be corrected. A trained speech clinician observes and keeps in touch with each student, giving such clinical help as is needed periodically throughout the quarter and for a longer period where deemed advisable. Credit in FUNDAMENTALS OF SPEECH is given only after the student is dismissed from the speech clinic.

The communication program deals with both oral and written English. COMPOSITION I, COMPOSITION II, and NEWS WRITING tend to emphasize practice in written communication, and the course FUNDAMENTALS OF SPEECH tends to emphasize practice in spoken communication. Students are encouraged, however, to consider all aspects of communication—reading, speaking, writing, and listening—as integral elements of the communicative process.

Properly speaking, the reading of "literature" is not a part of the communication program as discussed here. All students are required to take a literature course, in addition to the courses described above. In COMPOSITION I and COMPOSITION II each instructor selects his own book of readings, and the tendency is to select contemporary materials related to students' current problems.

There is a minimum of emphasis upon grammar *as grammar*. We are interested only in those functional aspects of grammar which correlate demonstrably with effective speaking and writing. They are dealt with mainly as they grow out of class experience and are not set up as formalized "units" to be administered to all students. Students who have an understanding of language structure and who are able to communicate effectively will not be seriously handicapped by a lack of mastery of grammatical terminology.

Workbooks are not used, nor are any "special drills" prescribed for composition courses. All instructors do emphasize standard American usage, but the amount of emphasis and the kind of emphasis are geared to the needs of a particular class or, as far as possible, to the needs of individual students.

In COMPOSITION I and COMPOSITION II students write approximately one paper a week, about half of which are written in class. In NEWS WRITING the number of written assignments is somewhat higher. The course descriptions above indicate the nature of other activities carried on by composition classes.



## NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

By ERNEST SAMUELS

Since our freshman English course is an omnibus course in which we teach a variety of skills, though "skills" is rather an inadequate word, the course is very hard to summarize. Our staff is made up of experienced and able persons for the very great part and they use a great deal of variety and ingenuity in working out detailed methods of instruction. Some make considerable use of mimeographed materials, quizzes, drills, etc.; others make very little use of such aids. Moreover, since ours is a service course, receiving students from a half dozen professional schools as well as the College of Liberal Arts, the needs of the classes will vary greatly as will their preparation.

We give what we call a Placement examination at the beginning of the year, but this is used simply to exempt from English A the top eleven per cent. The exempted students are commonly directed into sophomore English courses. We use a test of mechanics of expression, effectiveness of expression, and reading comprehension. This is a multiple choice electrically scored test.

All non-exempt students take the regular course. Largely for reasons of economy we do not section our students according to ability. A departmental tutor is provided for poor students, and our instructors are making increasing use of the tutor. Our main reliance in this matter is upon conferences. Weak students are usually required to attend special conferences and to do special work—revision of themes, grammar drills as needed, vocabulary and spelling assignments, special reading assignments, etc.

We do not give special instruction in "oral" English, but we do stress informal work in improving effectiveness of recitations and oral readings and reports. "Oral" English is not separately graded. Some of our instructors experiment occasionally with the group dynamic approach. Some of us also explore so-called problems in listening, but the approach is completely non-technical. Ours is not a "communications" course; nor is it strictly a "composition" course. From what I have seen and heard at annual conferences like the CCCC I have come to the conclusion that the term "communications course" is about as all-inclusive as the equally inadequate term "composition course." The "conventional" or "old-fashioned" course seems to have disappeared. The chief surviving debate seems to be over how much overt and explicit grammar and punctuation work should be included. The semantic and linguistic approach reflected in many textbooks surely indicates

the steady drift toward the stress upon function and the wholeness of the writing experience and toward more rigorous analysis of texts, whether expository or imaginative. The reading of some literature is included in our course: essays, short stories, novels, poems, plays.

Not much time is spent upon grammar in the abstract. Commonly several class meetings early in the course will review the essentials of grammar and correct usage and punctuation. Most of us assign some exercises in the text. The great majority of our students are sufficiently well prepared to avoid the grosser and more obvious errors. Thereafter we are concerned with the more troublesome questions of unity, coherence, emphasis, style, and choice of words. Particular problems in mechanics as they appear in themes are taken up in individual conferences.

There is a great difference of opinion among us on the value of extensive grammatical terminology. It is highly desirable that a student be able to talk about his writing problems, i.e., his grammatical ones, using a convenient vocabulary. We urge our staff to train the student in basic terms, but we do not require the student to pass any test on them. Our approach is pragmatic. Can the student write effectively? Can he read intelligently?

We are opposed to any extensive or general drill work in spelling, punctuation, and usage. Such work is done only in isolated cases.

Additional information concerning English A may be obtained from these quotations from the syllabus given each instructor:

### *Objectives of the Course: Writing*

Students in English A are expected to develop a good working knowledge of the mechanics of the language, especially of standard contemporary usage in punctuation, spelling, and the forms of words and sentences. Second, through reading and discussion of the selections in the anthologies, they should discover the qualities of contemporary informal style. Third, on the basis of this relatively factual knowledge, they should learn to write clear and idiomatic English; that is, English which observes current grammatical conventions and which has a style and organization appropriate to themselves, their audience, and their subject. Fourth, they should learn to make use in their papers of their own resources of thought and experience. They should develop, to the extent possible, a mature and realistic attitude toward the ideas and experiences that they attempt to communicate; and they should learn how to organize material so as to make effective contact with readers.



*Objectives of the Course: Reading*

The purpose of reading literature in English A is to increase the range and intensity of the students' response to literature; to give them some relatively sophisticated examples of literature to work on, so that they can develop "a full and appropriate response to what deserves to be called 'literature.'" Part of this full and appropriate response, the Committee thinks, is just learning to enjoy reading; therefore some effort should be made to show the students the humane values of reading.

Used with discretion, the method of critical analysis by class discussion seems best suited to the ends of the course. In order to carry on such discussion, the students will need a technical vocabulary; so they should understand the meanings of such terms as theme, plot, action, motivation, characterization, point-of-view, and others; they should understand how these various aspects of a story work together to produce a total effect. But that effect should always be analyzed, as much as possible, in terms familiar to a student.

*Required Conferences*

English A gives four hours of credit a quarter, although it meets only three times a week. The students earn this additional hour of credit because they must spend a good deal of their time in writing, and because they must attend conferences with their instructors to discuss their individual problems as writers. Instructors must schedule at least two fifteen-minute conferences a quarter with each student, and they should be prepared to see students at other times, if asked.

**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

By HENRY L. WILSON

The Freshman Composition course at Southern Illinois University starts with a review of formal grammar, in order to provide all students with the terms and concepts basic to the discussion of language, and includes the usual work in punctuation and grammatical usage. Some more general problems of communication are dealt with, including the effect of context on meaning, the uses of report language and emotional language, and levels of usage. Although literature is not taught as literature, readings are used as backgrounds for discussion and for writing and as material for the study of current practice in writing.

The students write an average of one theme a week, and about half of the themes are impromptu; the writing probably totals

more than twelve thousand words during the year. A literary flavor is not expected or especially desired. In the first two terms, most of the writing is informal exposition, and clear expression and organization are stressed. In the third quarter, the writing is more formal, and the presentation of evidence and proper citing of authority are stressed.

A qualifying examination is given at the beginning of the year as a basis for sectioning. About two thirds of the freshmen enter "normal" (A) sections, which meet three times a week; those who rank in the lowest third on the test are placed in special (B) sections, which meet four times a week; the additional hour is used for drill in whatever deficiencies the students reveal. At the end of the first six weeks and at the beginning of the second quarter, students are transferred to a higher or lower section if their work shows that they were incorrectly classified by the placement test. A sub-freshman course is not provided, and few students, however well trained, are excused from the regular freshman course.

Although ignorance of formal grammar is a handicap to students entering the composition course at Southern Illinois University, the greatest handicap that the staff commonly finds is lack of practice in expository writing.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

By ROBERT E. STREETER

The majority of the students entering the College of the University of Chicago will take English A-B-C, the central composition course, in their first year. In a typical year, after we have examined the results of the placement test, we assign sixty to sixty-five per cent of our entrants to English A-B-C. Ten per cent of the new students are likely to receive a recommendation that they enroll in Basic Writing Skills, a one-quarter course devoted to intensive work in such fundamentals as sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and diction. This group taking remedial work will ordinarily go on to English A-B-C during their second year in the College. The remaining twenty-five to thirty per cent—the cream of the newcomers—are excused from English, and, in the College, will receive their only formal instruction in writing when they take Humanities 3, a course which combines the critical study of literature, art, and music with the regular preparation of themes.

Our battery of placement devices currently includes objective-type tests of verbal abilities, writing skills, and reading compre-



hension, supplemented by a two-hour essay on one of four assigned topics. "Supplemented" is hardly an accurate term for what actually happens, since our battery is so weighted that the placement essay has a very nearly overriding effect upon the student's score. His performance on this essay is by far the most important factor in determining whether he be excused from English, held for our principal course, or recommended for remedial work.

If a student writes an essay relatively rich in content, clearly and logically organized, and free from error in mechanics, he will probably be excused from English. If his paper is reasonably free from fundamental errors but is poorly organized and "thin" in content, he will go into English A-B-C. If basic errors abound in the student's prose, he will wind up in the remedial course. It should be added that the topics set for the placement essay are sufficiently broad so that students will not be handicapped by the feeling that they know little about the subject. All students, whether they come to Chicago with a high school diploma or at the eleventh or twelfth grade levels, take the same placement test.

We also use the reading comprehension test in our placement battery as an indicator to refer students to another remedial course, Basic Reading Skills. Ordinarily ten to twelve per cent of the entrants show need for this special work.

English A-B-C, the core of our writing program, is designed to familiarize the students with what appear to us to be the most useful techniques of exposition and argument. We concentrate on these because they are the forms of writing generally admitted to be most necessary to fruitful discussion, sound judgment, and intelligent action by men and citizens. We do not teach description or narration, except as subordinate to exposition and argument, because we cannot teach everything and because, in our opinion, description and narration are less important, for the man and citizen, than statement and defense.

Because of this emphasis, much of our attention is given to organization, logic, means of persuasion, and, in the spring quarter, style. Systematic drill on syntax, punctuation, and diction is not ordinarily used in our classes; however, instructors are encouraged to organize this kind of practice for students who show specific weaknesses in their writing. Drill, of course, is a leading activity in the Basic Writing Skills course.

Our sole objective in the composition course is the improvement of the student's writing. The study of such literary forms

as poetry, drama, and fiction occurs in the sequence of Humanities courses in the College. Consequently, we are spared the diffusion of energy which sometimes occurs when instruction in writing is merely a handmaiden of the introductory course in literature. We hope, however, that many of the examples of cogent expository and argumentative prose which we print in our syllabi may also qualify as "literature." We do not offer work in speech, although our instruction in argumentation deals with some matters often taken up in courses in public address.

We ask our students to write seven to eight themes each quarter, of which two are likely to be written during the class hour. Themes written outside class average from 750 to 1000 words. In addition, instructors usually assign two or three briefer exercises to bring out particular points. The student's achievement in the course is measured, not by grades on themes throughout the year, but by his performance in a comprehensive examination given at the end of his three quarters of work. This comprehensive examination usually includes five hours of essay writing plus an hour of objective testing; here, again, as in the placement test, the quality of prose demonstrated in the essay is the chief determinant of the student's grade.

Finally, our attitude toward knowledge of grammatical terminology can best be demonstrated by the fact that a committee, set to its task by decision of the entire College faculty, has just produced a 30-page booklet, *Elements of English Grammar*, published in September by the University of Chicago Press. The fruit of two years of continuing discussion, this summary of important grammatical distinctions and terms will be in the hands of all our students in English. Although neither in the placement test nor in the comprehensive examination do we award grades to students on the basis of their familiarity with the vocabulary of grammar, the appearance of this booklet reflects our belief that some sophistication in dealing with the terminology of grammar will prove useful to the student of writing.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

By CHARLES W. ROBERTS

### 1. Proficiency Tests

All freshmen entering the University of Illinois are given a pre-registration Freshman Rhetoric Proficiency Test to determine how much further training in written composition they need in order to handle their college writing responsibilities. The test



takes two hours and is in two parts. The first part consists of a multiple-choice objective test covering vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, applied grammar, and sentence effectiveness. There are one hundred items in the test, and the student must determine which of three possible answers to each item is the correct one. The second, and more important, part of the test consists of an impromptu composition, about three pages in length, written on a subject selected from a list of twenty diversified topics. Ordinarily there is a close correlation between the objective test score and the proficiency shown on the composition, but, where there is a lack of correlation, the composition is considered the more valid evidence of proficiency.

The decision regarding each student's placement is made by a faculty committee of three. Each composition is read by at least two staff members, and, if they do not agree, by a third for a final decision. One of three decisions must be made: (1) the student is not yet ready to take a college-level course in composition with a fair chance of passing it, (2) the student is ready for a college-level course, and (3) the student does not need the first semester of a college-level course. Students in the first group, usually from twenty to thirty percent of those taking the test, are denied admission to Rhetoric 101 but may enroll in Rhetoric 100 to make up their deficiency. Such students usually make objective test scores in the 60's or below and write compositions marred by a lack of organization and by gross errors. Students in the second group, the great majority, are registered in Rhetoric 101. Their scores are usually in the 70's, and their writing shows a fair degree of competence but needs considerable improvement. Students in the third group, usually about five percent, are so proficient that they do not need the elementary college course. Their objective test scores are usually in the 80's or 90's and their compositions are unusually good. They are granted exemption from Rhetoric 101, with three hours of credit, and are registered in Rhetoric 102.

Pre-registration placement of students in Rhetoric 100 and Rhetoric 101 is tentative. The first three weeks of the semester are considered probationary. The assignments in Rhetoric 100 and Rhetoric 101 are the same and include further testing and writing. At the end of the third week, instructors may recommend the transfer of such students as seem out of place in either program. Committees consider these recommendations and may approve transfers of students from Rhetoric 100 to Rhetoric 101 or from Rhetoric 101 to Rhetoric 100. There is no such reconsideration of pre-registration decisions regarding exemption from the course.

## 2. Objectives and Plan of Freshman Rhetoric

Freshman Rhetoric is designed to assist the student in the development of his ability to understand and evaluate what he hears and reads and his ability to write and speak intelligibly and effectively.

Rhetoric 100 is a three-hour remedial course, without college credit, designed to prepare the handicapped student for admission to Rhetoric 101. In it he is given a working knowledge of grammar, correct sentence and paragraph construction, and punctuation. He is also encouraged to enlarge his vocabulary and to improve his spelling. He writes short compositions and revises and improves them in the light of his instructor's suggestions. At the end of the semester, his final examination will be a proficiency test similar to the one he took at the beginning of the term. A committee of staff members will determine whether the test justifies his admission to Rhetoric 101. If the committee approves his admission, his instructor will then determine his semester grade on the basis of work done throughout the semester.

Rhetoric 101 is a three-hour course designed to help the average student to improve his ability (1) to express his ideas easily, accurately, and effectively, (2) to read with understanding and pleasure, (3) to listen to others and to understand the purpose, direction, and detail of what they are saying, and (4) to speak before a group effectively and without embarrassment. The course emphasis is on writing and free class discussion of composition problems. Although models of good writing are studied, the course is not one in literature. Although speaking in class is encouraged and appraised, the course does not give training in speech. Mature thinking which has been crystallized into effective written composition is the goal of the course.

Rhetoric 102 is a three-hour course designed to improve further the skills developed in Rhetoric 101. Mature thinking is encouraged by training in the discernment of truth through library investigation and through the careful analysis of methods of argument or persuasion. Some attention is given to the narrative prose forms that constitute much of the recreational reading of the educated adult. Student writing in Rhetoric 102 is expected to be more sustained, more mature, and more polished and effective than the writing in Rhetoric 101.

## 3. A Note to High School English Teachers

Since testing and course work in Freshman Rhetoric at the University of Illinois emphasize writing, it follows that the best preparation for a pre-college student would give him considerable



practice in the expression of his own ideas in writing. If he has become accustomed to writing and to having his writing criticized constructively, he need have no qualms about the tests and the weekly themes required in most college courses.

In the introduction to the *Freshman Rhetoric Manual and Calendar*, our students are given the following counsel:

Your Freshman Rhetoric instructor has been employed, first, to help you to analyze the weak points and the strong points in your present ability to give clear expression to sound thinking, and, second, to indicate to you what you need to do to improve. His probing into your shortcomings may be painful at times, especially if your earlier efforts have not been exposed to searching criticism, but patience and application on your part and his should eventually result in a product of which you both may be proud.



## Best Poetry and Prose

All Illinois teachers of English are invited to submit to the editor the best writing of their students. One issue of the *Bulletin* will be devoted to the best poetry written during 1951 by Illinois high-school students, and another issue will be devoted to the best prose.

If you have not previously submitted any of your students' poetry or prose for consideration, please hesitate no longer. Although only a fraction of the writing submitted can be published, your students deserve the chance to have their best efforts considered for publication or honorable mention.

Send the manuscripts by first-class mail to J. N. Hook, 121 Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois. If you wish any of them returned, please enclose postage. Be sure to include the name of the student, his class (1952, etc.), the name of the school, and the name of the teacher under whose direction the writing was done. Try to guard against plagiarism.

The deadline is December 20.